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RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
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SUBJECT: CIS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION IN TURKMENISTAN

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A 40-member CIS election observation mission will monitor the December 14 Parliamentary elections. A group of six observers have been in Turkmenistan since November 25 to view election preparations. The remaining members, including many election officials from CIS countries, will arrive a few days before the elections. Preliminary impressions of the pre-election phase were positive, with the Deputy Chief of the Mission noting that the technical basis for the elections was largely in place. According to the Deputy Chief, there was a diverse group of candidates, including two candidates nominated by independent groups of citizens. The CIS mission's role was to evaluate the election's conformity with Turkmenistan's election laws. The Deputy Chief expected a post-elections recommendation to the Turkmen to regularize some inconsistencies between their election laws, but otherwise thought their laws are comparable with those of CIS countries. He characterized the mission's role as to advise, not to judge. END SUMMARY.

FIRST CIS ELECTION MISSION IN TURKMENISTAN

2. (SBU) On December 5, poloff met with the Deputy Chief of the CIS Election Observation Mission, Yevgeniy Sloboda, to discuss the upcoming parliamentary election and the observer mission's activities. CIS election observation missions began in 2001 and work only within the CIS and only upon invitation. This is the first time that there has been a CIS election observation mission in Turkmenistan, which Sloboda noted was a "voluntary government act that indicates a desire to develop a democratic society."

3. (SBU) There will be 40 people in the CIS mission. After the CIS Secretariat received the invitation from the GOTX, it sent letters to the foreign ministries of CIS members, asking them to send representatives as part of the observation mission. The members of the mission were designated by the respective governments, not by the CIS Secretariat. Among the members of the mission are the chairpersons of the Central Election Commissions (CEC) of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the secretary of the Belarus CEC and members of the CECs of Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Russia, as well as diplomats and parliamentary deputies from Uzbekistan, Belarus and Russia and the Tajik ambassador accredited to Turkmenistan. Sloboda emphasized the professional qualifications of the observer team, consisting of

individuals who organize or participate in elections in their respective home countries. The head of the observer mission is CIS Executive Secretary Sergey Lebedev.

#### INITIAL IMPRESSIONS ARE POSITIVE

14. (SBU) A group of six observers arrived in Turkmenistan on November 25 as "long-term observers." Their tasks included: completing accreditation documentation for the mission; evaluating election-related legislation in light of their professional expertise; examining media coverage of the election campaign; and visiting polling stations. The remaining members of the mission will arrive two or three days before election day and will be dispersed in groups of six to all five provinces, focusing their efforts on the most populous areas. On the morning of December 15, the CIS mission will hold a press conference and release its statement about the conduct of the elections. Sloboda said they release the statement immediately following the election in order to maximize its relevance.

15. (SBU) By way of initial impressions, Sloboda mentioned that the observers have had completely open access. All polling stations have posters and information about the campaign. Provincial newspapers published biographies and platforms of all candidates. The Turkmenistan CEC had conducted training for all members of polling station committees. The CIS observers had seen nothing to date that violated Turkmenistan's Election Law.

16. (SBU) Sloboda commented that recent amendments to the

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Election Law had improved the law. The role of international observers was strengthened. The number of electoral districts was increased to 125, giving the legislative branch a more important role. For the first time, Turkmen citizens abroad will be able to vote at Turkmenistan's embassies. Also for the first time, pre-trial detainees have been given the right to vote.

#### CIS MISSION COMPARES CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS WITH LEGAL FRAMEWORK

17. (SBU) According to Sloboda, the CIS mission's goal is to determine the extent to which the conduct of the elections is consistent with Turkmenistan's Election Law. The CIS mission does not play the role of comptroller, but rather serves as a group of experts available to give advice on election issues. They are "non-political" and adhere to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

18. (SBU) By way of general observations, Sloboda said he had seen a strong desire on the part of the Turkmenistan CEC to conduct "good" elections. At this point, he had a positive overall perspective about preparations for the election, saying the technical basis for the elections is already in place. Since it is the first time that the Turkmen have invited foreign observers, they want to make a positive impression, which Sloboda also considered to be a good sign that elections would be well-run. He expected the observer mission would make a recommendation to the GOTX to regularize Turkmenistan's election laws, which he said sometimes have contradictory provisions. Generally, he thought Turkmen election laws were comparable with election laws of CIS countries.

19. (SBU) The Turkmen Foreign Ministry provided the CIS mission with candidate information, according to which 56 of the candidates are women and ninety percent of candidates have higher education. Sloboda said candidates represent all sectors of "civil society" and there are either two or three candidates for each seat. He also mentioned that the CIS observers had encountered independent candidates, nominated at the initiative of a group of citizens versus by a mass organization, in two districts in Ashgabat, noting that while the practice of independent candidacies was not widespread,

it nonetheless existed.

#### CIS APPLIES ITS OWN STANDARDS FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

¶10. (SBU) He mentioned that the CIS election missions generally have good contacts with OSCE observers and that they have a "gentleman's agreement" not to comment on each other's findings. He stated the methodology used by CIS election missions is "practically the same" as that used by the OSCE. The standards applied by CIS missions are based on the 2002 CIS Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections, which is mandatory for all member states who have adopted it.

The key elements are secret ballot, non-discrimination and free voting. Sloboda stressed the appropriateness of conducting an election observation mission in Turkmenistan, saying that the outcome of the elections could not be known in advance. An on-the-ground presence is needed to see the mentality, desire and responsibility of all the participants in the electoral process.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: The deputy chief's comments about Turkmen preparedness for the elections and the openness of Turkmen election officials were consistent with observations by Embassy reporting officers during provincial trips to observe election preparations. It is likely that the post-election CIS statement will be positive, given the CIS mission's focus on the technical aspects of the elections. Sloboda characterized the mission's role as to advise, not to judge. As such, it will not challenge the Turkmen to improve their elections' infrastructure in ways that would increase citizen involvement and produce a more dynamic public policy debate.  
END COMMENT.  
MILES